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ABSTRACT

Since phonemic awareness is a crucial element in the invented spelling process, a survey of 15 whole language teachers determined the standpoint of phonemic awareness in the philosophy of whole language teachers. The 15 teachers, all 5 kindergarten and 10 first-grade teachers in a school district in western New York, were administered a 16-item Likert-type survey. Results indicated that: (1) teachers believed that invented spelling is a developmental process; (2) the teachers failed to provide a supporting environment for emergent spellers; and (3) teachers also failed to support their belief in invented spelling with class activities. Findings suggest that whole language teachers need to extend their lessons to touch upon phonemic awareness. (Contains nine references, five figures of data, and sample lessons and class activities. The survey instrument is attached.) (Author/RS)

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Running head: Invented Spelling and Misconceptions

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Invented Spelling; What Is The Problem? The misconceptions of Whole Language Teachers

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Abstract

Phonemic awareness is a crucial element of the invented spelling process. Many students are able to develop this ability on their own through repeated activities revolving around print and writing. But there are those that need facilitation in this awareness to develop the proper skills to invent spelling. Many Whole Language teachers have drifted away from facilitating phonemic awareness, assisting emergent spellers in invented spelling. A survey of fifteen Whole Language teachers was conducted in order to determine the stand point of phonemic awareness in the philosophy of Whole Language teachers.

Invented Spelling and Misconceptions

Invented spelling does not mean, whatever the student writes is okay. In fact the concept of invented spelling entails many processes beyond what is written on paper. Early invented spellings allow for insight into how children perceive the sound system of their language before and during early reading instruction (Tangel, Blachman, 1992).

The process of invented spelling is developed from the children's understanding of a system beyond rote memorization of words. Read (1971,1975) states that since pre-reading children do not have a visual image of words in memory, when they are asked to represent words in written form they do so based on articulatory features. In order for a child to produce invented spellings they need to posses some degree of linguistic awareness, specifically a beginning awareness that words are made up of segments of sounds. Phonological awareness refers to the awareness of the sound segments in words, and letters and their sound relationship (Tangel, Blachman, 1992). Research supports that students who receive instruction in phonological awareness find greater success in spelling (Fawcett, 1990).

Invented spelling is a developmental process like learning to talk. Whether a child is developmentally ready for a task is a result of experience. Provided experience with letters and sounds lends in helping a child reach later developmental stages in spelling (Fawcett, 1990). Pryor and Stuart (1991), cite Henderson's (1980) predictable stages in children's spelling development.

Stage 1- Pre phonetic, refers to a child's random string of letters. They are aware of letters in this stage but do not connect them with sounds.

Stage 2- The early phonetic stage, refers to the use of letters to represent sound. In these spellings many letters are missing, often vowels or consonant clusters.

Stage 3- The letter name is the stage when children understand what a word is and often uses the names of letters and/or sounds to represent a word.

Stage 4- The transitional stage is when increasing accuracy of vowel spelling occurs, especially short vowels.

A classroom environment can encourage good spellers. Plenty of opportunities to talk about words should be provided; writing and talking about words, reading and conferring about words, playing with language and words, and most importantly conducting mini lessons about words and their spellings. Many spelling references should appear around the room; wall charts, dictionaries and posted lists of words that students know they are responsible for spelling correctly (Routman, 1993). When sending a student to a dictionary or thesaurus for a word, be sure they have the appropriate skill for using that text. Spelling is a social process in which students derive meaning through interpretations of transactions between themselves, others and the environment (McIntyre, 1989).

Telling students to try their best and spell the word the way they think it is spelled, conveys the message that spelling is not important. Teachers need to hold students accountable for basic standards in their writing, such as;

neat hand-writing, correct spellings of high frequency words, and checking for meaning, spelling and punctuation. Students in turn will perceive writing as a serious process and will gain pride in their work.

Purpose

In the early stages of the Whole Language movement, educators understood the nature of the language learning process and believed that students would learn to spell through extensive reading and writing activities (Routman, 1993). Although these activities provide experiences for spelling there is yet a need for teachers to act as facilitatAre Whole Language teachers facilitating the invented spelling process?ors during this developing process. Students still need strategies of spelling to be explicit for them. Through the years invented spelling has been misunderstood along with misused. Whole Language teachers have misunderstood the idea of invented spelling, while under the assumption that interfering with a student's writing is against the Whole Language philosophy. Although lack of interfering results in students writing more, student's work tends to become illegible, containing many misspellings of commonly used words. Parents are beginning to voice concerns and teachers are becoming frustrated.

The purpose of research was to see if Whole Language teachers from a specific school district in New York, five kindergarten grade teachers, and ten first grade teachers, act as facilitators of the invented spelling process by providing phonemic awareness, and supportive environment for emergent spellers while holding their students responsible for the basic standards of writing.

Posing questions

Do Whole Language teachers understand the concept of invented spelling? Is the environment of their rooms supportive of emergent spellers? Do they hold their students responsible for basic standards of writing, portraying a positive attitude toward spelling? Most importantly, Are Whole Language teachers using strategies to increase learners' phonemic awareness in order for them to proceed through the developmental stages of invented spelling?

Method

Subjects

Fifteen teachers were taken from a specific school district in western New York. Five of these teachers are kindergarten teachers, and the other ten are first grade teachers. These teachers include all of the kindergarten and first grader teachers of this district. The school district that is being studied believes very strongly in the Whole Language, basing their instruction on this philosophy. I chose to use the kindergarten and first grade teachers because these are the grades when the students are emergent spellers. Out of the fifteen teachers two of the teachers are males. The average age of these teachers is 39.7. The average number of years that they have been teaching is 15 years.

Measures

The teachers were administered likart survey of sixteen statements. Statements 1-6 referred to their perception of invented spelling and their perception of the importance of phonemic awareness as part of the

developmental stages in invented spelling. Statements 7-12 refer to the environment that the teachers provide and the attitudes they portray about spelling in the classroom. Finally, statements 13-16 refer to the activities they use in order to facilitate and produce invented spelling. Area at the end of the survey was then provided for any comments they had on the topic of invented spelling.

The surveys were broken into the three sections and scored. For each strongly agreed response they would receive 4 points. Each time the response was agree they would receive 3 points, disagree earned 2 points, and strongly disagree earned 1 point. The score of all of the teachers was then averaged for each sub-group to determine the average score for each area. An average of 3 or higher on section one suggests they believe phonemic awareness is important in the process of invented spelling. In section two, statements 7-12, an average of 3 or higher suggests that they provide a adequate environment and portray positive attitudes about spelling in their classroom. An average of 3 or higher on section three, statements 13-16, suggests that the teacher is providing activities that facilitate in phonemic awareness. The comments were then looked at for further views on invented spelling.

Procedures

The fifteen teachers were administered the survey by their Super Intendent at an end of the year meeting. They were assured that this survey was not to evaluate their job performance in order to avoid bias answers. They were told it was a survey for a graduate student studying reading and

instruction. The surveys were then collected by the Super Intendent and given to the graduate student.

Results

Insert Figure 1

Insert Figure 2

Do Whole Language teachers understand the concept of invented spelling?

On average the teachers believed that invented spelling is a developmental process. They believed that phonemic awareness is an important skill in developing invented spelling. Although they believed that phonemic awareness is important not one teacher agreed that teaching phonemic awareness aids students in invented spelling.

Insert figure 3

Is the environment of their rooms supportive of emergent spellers? Do they hold their students responsible for basic standards of writing, portraying a positive attitude toward spelling?

Even though the teachers believed in the process of invented spelling, they fail in providing a supportive environment for emergent spellers. they do not portray a positive attitude toward the importance of spelling. All of the teachers responded that they tell the students to spell a word the way it sounds. They also tell the students that spelling doesn't count. On average

their students are not responsible for spelling high frequency words. Most of the teachers said that they do not take off for spelling of common words, neatness, or basic punctuation.

Insert Figure 4

Are Whole Language teachers using strategies to increase learners' phonemic awareness in order for them to proceed through the developmental stages of invented spelling?

Along with failing to provide a positive environment for invented spelling the teachers fail to support their belief of invented spelling with class activities. All of the first grade teachers said that they use spelling books for spelling instruction. Only six teachers agreed that they use mini lessons to facilitate spelling. None of them agreed to using activities that revolve around phonemic awareness.

Insert Figure 5

Discussion

Although research suggests the importance of phonological and linguistic awareness for developing invented spelling, it appears that

these aspects often may not be taken into account in the classroom. I think that teachers, especially those who support the Whole Language philosophy are mistaken when they hear the deadly word "phonics". They correlate phonics with the hooked on phonics program and they know that this process is a sin according to the Whole Language philosophy. Rather research is suggesting phonemic awareness as an indirect factor in the development of spelling abilities. Phonemic awareness and spelling interact in such a way that each enhances the others development (Griffith, 1991).

The statements on phonics seemed to offend many of the teachers. Many of the teachers wrote in the comment area and regurgitated the philosophy of Whole Language in their responses, stating that reading and writing are taught as a whole, not as a skill and drill process as is phonics. All of the kindergarten teachers commented that their students were to young to hold responsible for the basic mechanics in writing. They said that they hold their students responsible for spelling their names but that is about it.

Rather than considering phonemic awareness as a hopeful developmental skill, research suggests it can be acquired through training activities that are not skill and drill procedures, during the early years of instruction. Integrating reading and writing

emphasizes these procedures. Text with predictable language structures such as rhyme and alliteration, plays with language use. It focuses the student's attention on words at the level of a phoneme (Griffith, 1991). Shared book reading which includes purposeful pointing to words as they are being read orally, focuses the child's attention on the visual forms of a word. Focusing on a spoken and written word simultaneously, enhances the spellings of phonemes and of whole words (Pryor, Stuart, 1991).

Along with reading these types of texts aloud, a discussion about the words in the text needs to occur. For example questions like the following could be discussed; What letters make a given sound in this word? What other letters or words have we talked about that make this sound? While these questions are being asked, charts of the responses should be made and posted in the room for further reference.

The following is an example lesson for using words and letters as manipulatives according to Cunnigham (1992). The children have the vowel letters *a* and *i* and the consonant letters *g*, *n*, *p*, *r*, and *s*.

* Take two letters and make the word *in*.
* Add a letter to make the three-letter word *pin*.
* Change just one letter, and turn *pin* into *pig*.
* Now lets make a four-letter word, add a letter to the word *pig* and make the word *pigs*.
* What four letter word would we have if we took away the *g* and we put back the letter *n*?

* What four-letter word could you make if you changed the vowel in the word pins?

This process continues until all of the letters are used. Using activities like making words in a classroom that uses invented spelling, encourages results not only in phonemic awareness for those who lack in it, but also in decoding abilities in students who already have phonemic awareness skills (Cunningham, 1992). I would then suggest that a chart of these words be made while the students are making the words. This procedure would model the written form of the word and provide a reference chart for the room. I would also suggest that at the end of the lesson the students be encouraged to experiment making words on their own .

LEA (language experience approach) stories are helpful instruments for modeling the reading and writing of phonemes (Fawcett, 1990). As you write the student's given words on chart paper, sound out the word in segments, writing each segment as it is sounded out. This shall increase the student's awareness that words are made up of phonemic segments represented by the alphabet (Tangel, Blachman, 1992).

Summary

Misconceptions about invented spelling and phonics can lead to lack of successful spelling abilities in students. Teachers need to

become clearly aware of these ideas, excepting phonemic awareness as an indirect influence on invented spelling. Although the purpose of this paper is to stress the influence of phonemic awareness on invented spelling, it is likely that students who receive repeated opportunities to invent spelling will enhance their phonemic awareness in the process (Tangel, Blachman, 1992). Phonemic awareness and spelling interact in such a way that each enhances the others development (Griffith, 1991). It is important that teachers do not assume that all students have the ability to develop this awareness on their own. Teacher facilitation increases the awareness in students who do not have phonemic skills , while at the same time it increases the awareness of decoding strategies in those who are already aware of phonemic segments in words (Cunningham, 1992).

The activities that have been described in this paper are activities that are often used within Whole Language classrooms. These teachers just need to extend their lessons to touch upon phonemic awareness. Integrating reading, writing and phonemic awareness will produce successful decoding abilities needed for literacy skills. Reading text that plays with language focuses children's attention on words at the level of a phoneme. While writing develops the ability to segment phonemes, as it directly confronts the student with the problem of representing spoken language with written language (Pryor, Stuart, 1991).

Once students posses a degree of linguistic and phonemic awareness they will successfully produce invented spellings (Tangel, Blachman, 1992). Over attending to spelling may constrain students as writers, but accepting anything sends the message that spelling and writing are not important. By providing students with strategies that will help them to become successful spellers, and by setting standards of responsibility in their spelling and writing, the inaccurateness of invented spelling will no longer be a question. Parents will become less concerned as their child's spellings look more like conventional spellings and teachers will become less frustrated, especially in the upper grades.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	questions	S. Disagree	Disagree	agree	S. agree	MEAN
1	?#1	0	1	8	6	3.3
2	?#2	15	0	0	0	1
3	?#3	0	0	10	5	3.3
4	?#4	2	3	5	5	2.8
5	?#5	0	0	0	15	4
6	?#6	0	4	10	1	2.7
7						
8					Mean of Mean	2.85
9						
10						
11						
12		S. Disagree	Disagree	Agree	S. Agree	Mean
13	?#7	13	2	0	0	1.13
14	?#8	3	8	3	0	1.86
15	?#9	0	0	3	12	3.4
16	?#10	11	3	2	0	1.53
17	?#11	9	6	0	0	1.4
18	?#12	0	0	14	1	3.06
19						
20					Mean of Mean	2. 06
21						
22						
23		S. Disagree	Disagree	Agree	S. Agree	Mean
24	?#13	5	5	5	0	2.
25	?#14	9	4	2	0	1.53
26	?#15	15	0	0	0	1.
27	?#16	11	2	2	0	1.4
28						
29					Mean of Mean	1.48

Figure #1

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Figure #2

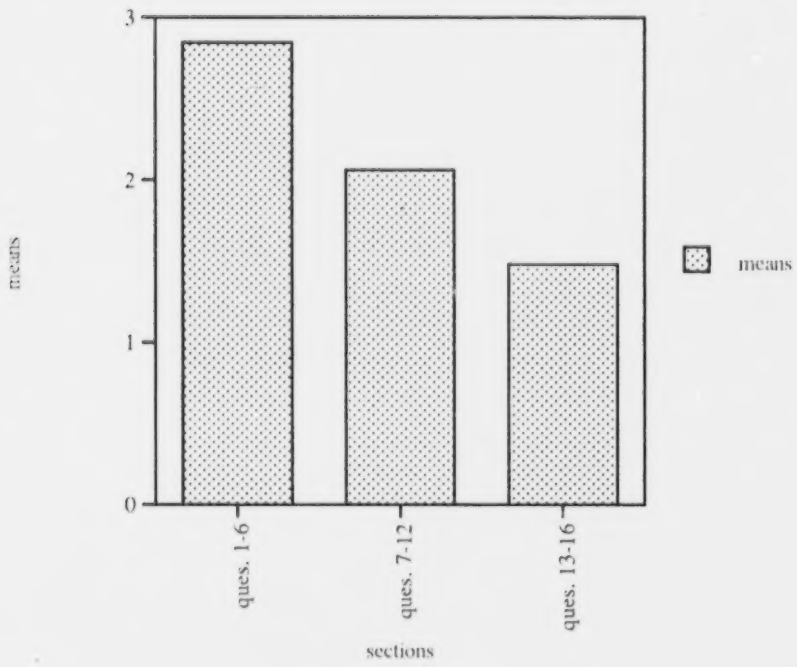


Figure # 3

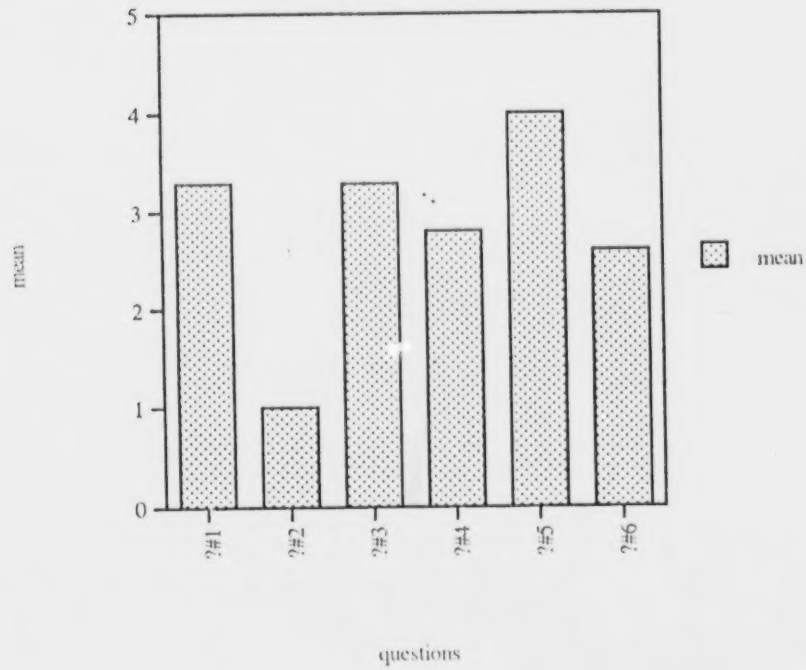


Figure #4

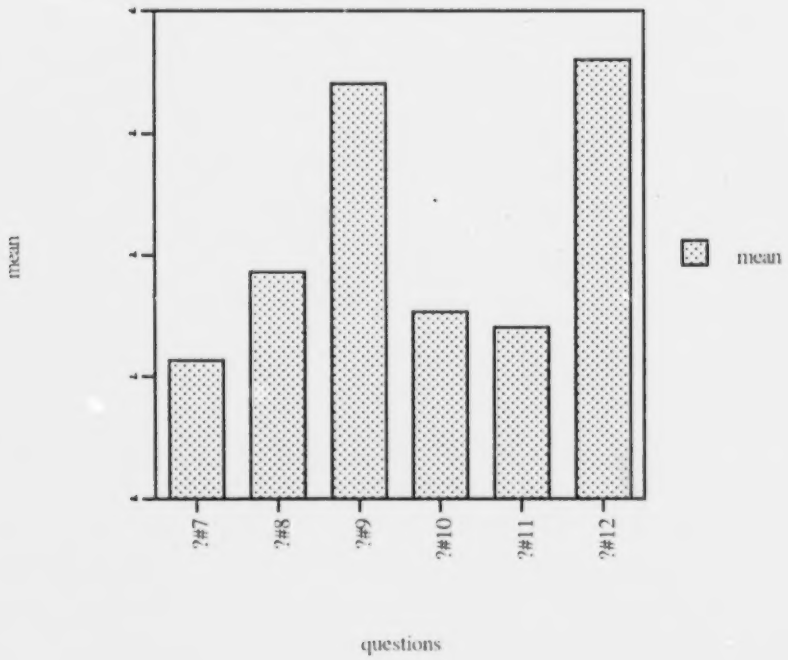
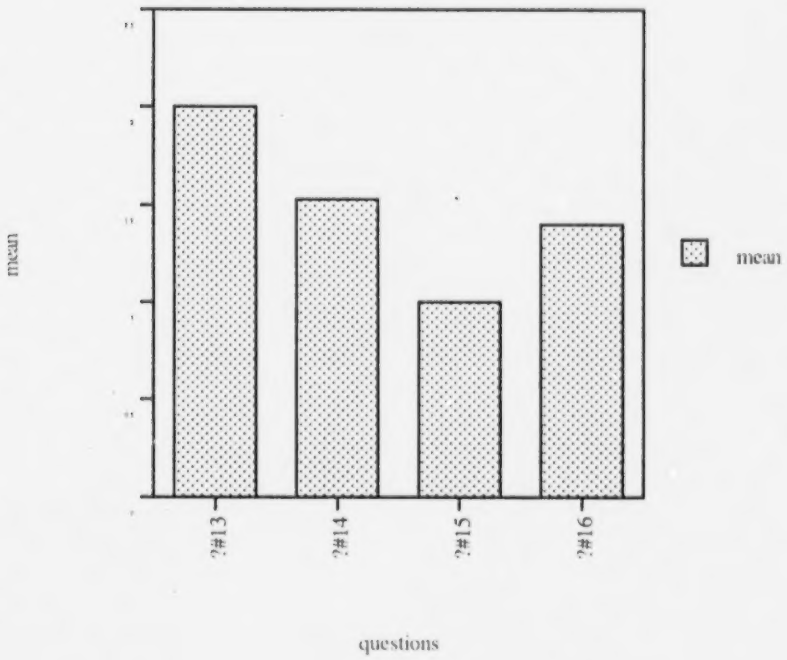


Figure # 5



Answer the following statements by circling the appropriate number to the right of the statement.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. In order for a child to produce invented spellings they need to posses some degree of linguistic awareness, specifically a beginning awareness that words are made up of segments of sounds.	1	2	3	4
2. Teaching phonic awareness helps to aid students in invented spelling.	1	2	3	4
3. Invented spelling is a develop-mental process.	1	2	3	4
4. Students need instruction in spell-ing in order to produce invented spelling.	1	2	3	4
5. A students written perception of a word is invented spelling.	1	2	3	4
6. Phonemic awareness and spelling interact in such a way that each enhances the others development	1	2	3	4

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
7. When a student asks me how to spell a word, I tell them to spell it the way it sounds.	1	2	3	4
8. When a student asks me if spelling counts, I tell them not as long they spelled it the best they can.	1	2	3	4
9. Dictionaries, wall charts and word lists are around my room.	1	2	3	4
10. We have a standard spelling book that we use each week & after learning new words the students are responsible for knowing them.	1	2	3	4
11. My students are responsible for basic standards in writing such as neatness, correct spelling of common words, and punctuation, or else their grade is lowered on their work.	1	2	3	4
12. My students are responsible for spelling high frequency words	1	2	3	4
13. Mini lessons on spelling are held frequently each week.	1	2	3	4

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
14. Activities with playing with the sounds of letters and words are used in my class.	1	2	3	4
15. I incorporate phonics in many of my Whole Language activities.	1	2	3	4
16. I model the fact that words are broken into phonemic segments through shared reading and LEA stories.	1	2	3	4

Age_____

Number Of Years Teaching _____

Female Male

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